

State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board

Fall 2010



The Student Advisory Board is part of Graduation Matters Montana, an initiative to increase the number of Montana students who graduate from high school through collaborative partnerships with schools, community organizations, businesses and youth.



“I believe students are the most important voice in helping us to address graduation rates and begin an overdue conversation about what is working and what needs improvement in order to ensure all Montana students graduate from high school, college-and career-ready.”

**Superintendent of Public Instruction,
Denise Juneau**



Montana’s first-ever State Superintendent’s Student Advisory Board (SAB) consisting of 40 high school students from 31 Montana schools gathered in Helena on November 11-12, 2010.

SAB members were first nominated by local school and community members, and completed an application process for selection. SAB members, in grades 9-12, traveled from rural communities such as Wibaux and Poplar and from larger communities like Billings and Missoula. The SAB reflects the range of experiences of Montana students.

SAB members and their adult chaperones participated in a welcome reception at Exploration Works, an interactive science museum, on Thursday evening, November 11. The following day, the students gathered at Carroll College. Six facilitators from Carroll College and Americorps*VISTA (ages 20-25) worked with the SAB alongside Office of Public Instruction staff. The students learned about national graduation initiatives and shared their perspectives with Superintendent Juneau on what kinds of school experiences students need to be successful.



Student Advisory Board Recommendations

The SAB provided Superintendent Juneau with advice and strategies to increase graduation rates in Montana.

School Policies and Climate

SAB members said that some school policies are not set up to help them succeed, nor are the rules consistently applied to all students. SAB members cited school policies that inadvertently make skipping school less of a transgression than being tardy, which in effect incentivizes absenteeism.

Research:

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, nowhere is the saying “Showing up is half the battle” more true than in education. The primary way to build the skills and knowledge necessary for success is through participation in classes. This is especially true for students who struggle academically or who lack academic support at home

SAB Recommendations:

- Have clear and consistent rules.
- Help us feel welcome at school and help to make school a place we want to go.
- All teachers should be on the same page, applying policies consistently.

Relevant Coursework and Experiences

SAB members said it is easy to lose motivation or a sense of purpose when course material is not relevant, does not apply to “real world” situations, or seems like “busy work”. In a survey given to the SAB, 96 percent of the members said future employment was a primary reason for attending school. As one SAB member said, “I would like more options to take useful classes that better my opportunity to succeed in life.”



Research:

- A student poll from America's Promise Student Poll in August of 2010 shows "nearly half of American students strongly believe that they will find a good job after graduation."
- The Silent Epidemic: Perspective of High School Dropouts conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation states, "On average, high school dropouts earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates, and about \$1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates."
- In Montana, all high school students will take at least one career and technical education course, and over half will take three or more.

SAB Recommendations:

- Provide classes that relate to real-world experiences students need to understand, such as financial management, taxes and checking accounts.
- Add more career and technical education classes with hands-on learning.
- Expand service-learning opportunities and make them available to all students.

Support and Relationships

SAB members said both parents and schools have a role in setting an expectation that all students will graduate. Relationships with adults help or hinder students' school experience. Students would like at least one adult to encourage them to stay in school. One Board member said, "Teachers need to encourage all students – not just the ones who are excelling."

Research:

- An America's Promise Student Poll in August of 2010 suggests that the decline in student engagement is largely attributable to students receiving less praise. Only 31% of ninth-grade students gave a 5 (out of 5) to the item "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork."



- The Silent Epidemic: Perspective of High School Dropouts recommends that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in their school. Through focus groups and one-on-one conversations with youth who had dropped out, the report concluded, “Young people craved one-on-one attention from their teachers, and when they received it, they remembered it making a difference.”

SAB Recommendations:

- Adults need to praise all students individually when appropriate.
- Schools can support more peer-to-peer communication as a way for students to feel valued.
- Ensure that all students have an adult advisor.
- In order to drop out, students should have to have a slip signed by all their teachers, so teachers can have a chance to support the student before they actually drop out.

Final Reflection and Next Steps

SAB members learned that other students have similar issues and concerns, even if they would not normally be friends in school. All students shared a desire to succeed. Students felt empowered and honored to be asked to give input and offer solutions to adults.

- SAB members have a private, closed Facebook group to provide direct feedback to Superintendent Juneau.
- A Graduation Matters Montana website was launched with a specific page for the SAB.
- The SAB will reconvene April 14-15th, 2011 in Helena, Montana to discuss school climate and guide next steps for Graduation Matters Montana.

References

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Lopez, Dr. Shane J. “Youth Readiness for the Future A Report of Findings from a Representative Gallup Student Poll Sample.” Gallup Student Poll Report August 2010. America’s Promise Alliance, Aug. 2010. Web. 05 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.gallupstudentpoll.com/141998/gallup-student-poll-report-august-2010.aspx>>.

Office of Public Instruction Measurement and Accountability Division. “Montana Statewide Dropout and Graduate Report 2008-09 School Year.” Montana Office of Public Instruction. 2009. Web. Jan. 2011. <http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/Measurement/DropoutReportFY08_09.pdf>.

Pinkus, Lyndsay. “Using Early-Warning Data to Improve Graduation Rates: Closing Cracks in the Education System.” Alliance for Excellent Education. Aug. 2008. Web. Jan. 2011. <<http://www.all4ed.org/files/EWI.pdf>>.

2010-2011 State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board Members

Ashley Bergstrand	Belgrade High School
Rachel Drost	Big Sky High School
Richard Wright	Big Sky High School
Tyus Rock Above	Billings Senior High School
Ty Show	Browning High School
Shannon Sullivan	Butte High School
Kristin Rossmiller	Conrad High School
Brooke Regan	Custer County District High School
Aurora Hurlburt	Cut Bank High School
Josie Vegoren	Darby High School
Cooper Johnston	Fergus High School
Nichole Fullbright	Fergus High School
Michelle Mulligan	Glasgow High School
Elizabeth Grandchamp	Glasgow High School
Logan Hendrix	Glacier High School
Brooke Guckeen	Great Falls High School
Collette Spangler	Great Falls High School
Megan Mathews	Hamilton Alternative School
Cody Preston	Helena High School
Taylor Mindt	Lambert Public Schools
Derek DeShazer	Lincoln County High School
Kaitlynn Lynch	Lincoln Public School
Guy Afflack	Paris Gibson Alternative High School
Celeste Never Miss A Shot	Paris Gibson Education Center
John Barlow	Park High School
Michael Devlin	Polson High School
Nicole Parshall	Poplar High School
Katherine Hibbs	Roberts High School
Taylor Spotted Horse	Rocky Boy High School
Sapphire Carter	Rocky Boy High School
Jaron Mudrow	Seeley-Swan High School
Dalen Erickson	Sentinel High School
Andrew Payne	Sentinel High School
Alec Kimball	Skyview High School
Jeanne Breakall	Twin Bridges High School
McKenzie Kralich	UM Helena- Access to Success
Cody Hill	Whitefish Independent High School
Jennifer Vail	Whitefish Independent High School
Walt Zeimer	Wibaux County High School

